

PLAYING

Children learn a lot about language through play. Play helps children think symbolically, so they understand that spoken and written words can stand for real objects and experiences. Play also helps children express themselves and put thoughts into words.

- Give your child plenty of playtime. Some of the best kinds of play are unstructured, when children can use their imaginations and create stories about what they're doing.
- Encourage dramatic play. When children make up stories using puppets or stuffed animals, they develop important narrative skills. This helps children understand that stories and books have a beginning, middle, and end.
- Pretend to read a book. Have your child tell you a story based on the pictures in a book. Or ask your child to "read" a book you've read together many times and tell you the story. This develops vocabulary and other language skills.



You are your child's first teacher, and your home is where your child begins to learn.

Help children get ready to read by providing early literacy opportunities around your home.

- Talk and listen to your child as you prepare meals, do household chores, get ready for bed—anytime is a good time for conversation.
- Sing songs and nursery rhymes, and play music. Your library is a great source for music CDs especially for children.
- Have books within easy reach. Make a special spot for books somewhere in your house. Come to the library often and find new books to make reading fun. Show your children how important reading is by reading yourself.
- Give your child many chances to draw and write. Keep paper and crayons or markers on a table where children can return again and again. Use magnetic letters on the refrigerator to spell words and messages.
- Have a prop box with inexpensive items that children can use for imaginative play.




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Help your child get ready to read with these simple activities.

TALKING

Children learn language and other early literacy skills by listening to their parents and others talk. As children hear spoken language, they learn new words and what they mean. They learn about the world around them and important general knowledge. This will help children understand the meaning of what they read.

- Make sure your child has lots of opportunities to talk with you, not just listen to you talk.
- Respond to what your child says and extend the conversation. “Yes, we did see a truck like that last week. It’s called a bulldozer.”
- Stretch your child’s vocabulary. Repeat what your child says and use new words. “You want a banana? That’s a very healthy choice.”
- If English isn’t your first language, speak to your child in the language you know best. This allows you to explain things more fluently so your child will learn more.



READING

Reading together—shared reading—is the single most important way to help children get ready to read. Reading together increases vocabulary and general knowledge. It helps children learn how print looks and how books work. Shared reading also helps children develop an interest in reading. Children who enjoy being read to are more likely to want to learn to read themselves.

- Read every day.
- Make shared reading interactive. Before you begin a book, look at the cover and predict what the book is about. Have your child turn the book’s pages. Ask questions as you read and listen to what your child says. When you finish the book, ask your child to retell the story.
- Use books to help teach new words. Books can teach less common words, words that children may not hear in everyday conversation. As you read, talk about what those words mean.

WRITING

Reading and writing go together. Both represent spoken language and communicate information. Children can learn pre-reading skills through writing activities.

- Writing begins with scribbles and other marks. Encourage this by providing many opportunities to draw and write.
- Children can “sign” their name to drawings, which helps them understand that print represents words. As they practice eye-hand coordination and develop their hand muscles, children can begin to write the letters in their names.
- Talk to your children about what they draw, and write captions or stories together. This helps make a connection between spoken and printed language.

SINGING

Songs are a wonderful way to learn about language. Singing also slows down languages so children can hear the different sounds that make up words. This helps when children begin to read printed language.

- Sing the alphabet song to learn about letters.
- Sing nursery rhymes so children hear the different sounds words make.
- Clap along to the rhythms in songs so children hear the syllables in words.